

School Readiness Initiative Task Force Meeting

March 12, 2001

Minutes

Members in attendance:

Kerry Mazzoni, Secretary for Education
Rob Reiner, Chair, California Children and Families Commission
Grantland Johnson, Secretary, Health and Human Services
Vincent Harris, Cabinet Representative, Governor's Office
Richard Figueroa, Deputy Legislative Secretary, Governor's Office
Rose Kaufman, Commissioner, Los Angeles County Children and Families Commission
Steven Ladd, Executive Director, on behalf of Pete Parra, Commissioner for the Kern County Children and Families Commission
Karen Blinstrub, Executive Director, on behalf of Yolanda Garcia, Commissioner for the Santa Clara County Children and Families Commission

Welcome and Introductions:

Kerry Mazzoni, Secretary for Education, and Rob Reiner, Chair, California Children and Families Commission, welcomed the Task Force members. The audience introduced themselves to the Task Force members.

Plan for School Readiness Initiative

The School Readiness Initiative Task Force members began the meeting discussing the current funding possibilities for the School Readiness Initiative. Acknowledging the tentative status of the State's revenue surplus due to the energy situation, Task Force members suggested a phased-in plan for continuing the work of the Task Force, with the California Children and Families Commission and County Commissions funding initial school readiness activities. The Plan would include:

- A financial contribution at some later date by the State General Fund
- A planning document for implementing school readiness programs throughout the State
- Immediate efforts to solve impediments currently faced by local entities and counties, such as providing statutory relief through AB 1741.

Discussion

Co-Chair Reiner asked other Task Force members for direction regarding ways in which the California Children and Families Commission can encourage County Commissions to get involved. Health and Human Services Secretary Grantland Johnson suggested ways in which statutory relief (via AB 1741) will help local Commissions' school readiness activities, as well as acknowledging that the County Commissions will understand the limited involvement by the State due to the energy situation. Co-Chair Mazzoni suggested that the Task Force get consensus on what kind of statutory relief would best promote participation by County Commissions. Co-Chair Reiner discussed that the Commission will continue with a scaled-down version of the plan and expand as financial resources are contributed by the State General Fund.

County Commission representatives discussed the needs of County Commissions, with a request for a school readiness assessment tool for immediate use. With agreement from the Task Force on the need for such an assessment tool, County Commission representatives specified that developing and delivering this school readiness assessment tool could be a goal for the Task Force while the Task Force is also engaged in the long-term planning effort. Regarding AB 1741, County Commission representatives further questioned the Task Force on the type of State funding currently supporting school readiness and how the AB 1741 process can impact federal regulations and/or programs (such as Improving America's Schools Act Title I or Head Start). Some concerns expressed by the County Commission representatives regarding the School Readiness Initiative included issues surrounding sustainability of school readiness programs, standardizing assessment tools, and a general desire for the State to bring new resources. The County Commission representatives affirmed their commitment in working with the California Children and Families Commission, and the School Readiness Task Force, on this plan.

Policy Deliberations

The Task Force deliberated upon the five policy questions included in the School Readiness Discussion Paper, and after discussion came to agreement on all five:

1. *Do the philosophy, services/supports, and processes for the 5 'essential elements' for School Readiness Center/Programs reflect effective practice?*

The Task Force agreed that they do.

2. *Should criteria and/or standards for these 'essential elements' be required for local applicants?*

Jane Henderson, Executive Director of the California Children and Families Commission, suggested that the quality standards based on research be built into the application process, and also represent part of the Task Force's work plan. Additionally, Task Force members discussed best practices options, including the provision of a menu of best practices for use by County Commissions when applying to the Request For Applications. The Task Force was in agreement.

3. *Should ongoing funding be tied to achievement of specified goals?*

Task Force members expressed that though County Commissions need to meet certain goals, they would receive support to be more successful. Task Force members further discussed the measurement of school readiness progress, the need to collect baseline data, and the need for a School Readiness assessment tool with interim reports regarding gap areas. The Task Force was in agreement.

4. *What recommendations do you have regarding lead agencies at the State and Local levels?*

The State and County Commissions, through a State and County partnership, initially will administer the program funded through the Prop 10 Initiative, though an advisory body could evolve (with key State agencies, County Commissions, and other partners) during the long-term planning process.

5. *What level of funding can we afford for the School Readiness Initiative? What is the recommended funding mix, including local match?*

County Commissions expressed a desire to participate in the initiative, though all firmly stated the need for additional financial resources. Task Force members recommended that the Commission use this year to talk with the County Commissions and find out the kind of commitment County Commissions will be able to make.

Next Steps

- The California Children and Families Commission will develop a timeline for the School Readiness Initiative with input from County Commissions regarding the development of the percentage of State funds to match with County funds.
- The School Readiness Advisory Committee will convene on March 30, 2001 to review the School Readiness Discussion Paper and implications for the expansion of AB 1741.